



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

## Founder of Opus Dei

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## Beginning Again

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**After escaping to the other side of Spain and staying briefly in Pamplona, St Josemaria settled in Burgos. From there, in conditions of great deprivation, in a country devastated by war, he carried out an intense apostolate.**

The so-called “Nationalist” zone of Spain during the war had established its provisional capital in Burgos. There government officials, civil servants, and many other people were waiting to return to their cities, among them Church officials. Beyond any political considerations, there was a rekindling of religious fervor there, perhaps in response to persecution.

After crossing the Pyrenees, the founder settled in Burgos, taking a room in a modest inn, the Hotel Sabadell. From this base he undertook an intense apostolate. First he had to track down the persons he knew before the war and continue their formation. He spared no effort to see them, traveling with almost no funds, enduring the discomfort brought on by the devastation of war. Some used their precious furloughs to come to see him in Burgos.

### **Apostle of apostles**

Father Josemaría encouraged all of them to think with broader horizons. The young men yearned for these meetings. “We used to go for walks along the banks of the River Arlanzón. There we would talk, and while they opened their hearts, I tried to guide them with suitable advice to confirm their decisions or open up new horizons in their interior lives. And always, with God’s help, I would do all I could to encourage them and stir up in their hearts the desire to live genuinely Christian lives. Our walks would sometimes take us as far as the abbey of Las Huelgas. On other occasions we would find our way to the cathedral.

“I used to enjoy climbing up the cathedral towers to get a close view of the ornamentation at the top, a veritable lacework of stone that must have been the result of very patient and laborious craftsmanship. As I chatted with the young

men who accompanied me I used to point out that none of the beauty of this work could be seen from below. To give them a material lesson in what I had been previously explaining to them, I would say: 'This is God's work, this is working for God! To finish your personal work perfectly, with all the beauty and exquisite refinement of this tracery stonework.'"

Father Josemaría dreamed of a great expansion of Opus Dei, of a fruitful service to the Church. Already he was thinking of preparing some of the young men to send to other countries. "Night was falling as you and I began our prayer. From close by came the murmur of water. And, through the stillness of the city, we also seemed to hear voices of people from many lands, crying to us in anguish that they do not yet know Christ. Unashamedly you kissed your crucifix and you asked Him to make you an apostle of apostles."

He traveled to speak about the Work with many bishops, who received him cordially and encouraged him. He collected liturgical objects and whatever else might be useful in beginning again in Madrid as soon as it would be possible. Above all, he sought books from whoever could give them. These young men would have to be well prepared to carry Christ to the various fields of knowledge and culture.

And as always, he preached by his example. Since the material for his doctoral thesis back in Madrid had been lost in the war, he began another line of research on the abbey of Las Huelgas, an institution with an unusual and interesting type of jurisdiction in canon law.

### **Thesis, journeys, correspondence**

He sent out a torrent of correspondence to keep in contact with all the people with whom he had ties, especially his spiritual sons. He wrote brief letters, incisive and paternal. But how long would he have to endure this waiting? He seasoned his desire to get moving with formidable mortifications, penances and fasts, and the resolution to abandon all concerns about money to our Lord. With the meager income that they could put together by pooling resources, they had barely enough to live on.

### **Back to Madrid**

Finally the moment arrived: they could return to Madrid. His holy impatience led him to enter the capital with the first military convoy that moved into the city. He was the first priest to return; it was March 28, 1939. The student

academy/residence, which had cost him so much sacrifice, appeared to be completely destroyed. In an emotional moment he retrieved from the rubble a framed inscription of the words which Jesus himself in the Gospel had defined as the new commandment and as the sign by which his disciples would be recognized: “That you love one another, even as I have loved you...”

Beginning again. A spirit of hope and sacrifice completely beyond the ordinary led him to open another residence. He moved his family there as well. His mother and sister took charge of managing the household tasks, and to this is owed, in good part, the family tone that can be found to this day in all the centers of Opus Dei.

In June he preached a retreat for students near Valencia, which gave a big lift to the work of Opus Dei in that city. Also in Valencia, **The Way** was published in September. A number of people began to arrive who wished to give themselves to God by committing themselves completely to Opus Dei. Although the difficult situation in Europe at the outset of World War II required postponement of plans for international development, expansion to other parts of Spain continued.